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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001261

SIPDIS

AT STATE FOR A/S DINA POWELL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OEXC](#) [SCUL](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CULTURAL AND  
SPORTS PROGRAMS

REF STATE 222516

[1](#)1. Response to Questions per referenced  
reftel.

[1](#)A. The population of Djibouti is passionate about sports and cultural programs, and Embassy-organized programs grant the Mission access to otherwise inaccessible audiences, and offer a unique opportunity for mutual understanding.

The Public Diplomacy Section (PD) organizes different activities during International Education Week (IEW). The soccer tournament that closes every IEW is the event that draws the most attention. This tournament works well to access the youth population with which we might not normally interact. Girls' soccer teams from middle schools and high schools participate fully in the tournament, supporting the Mission's commitment to encouraging girls' equal access to education. Ramadan tournaments also allow access to the youth that attend Islamic schools and to those who have dropped out of school.

These tournaments are not part of a formal PD sports program but they are one of the most effective and least expensive community outreach activities. As soccer is very popular, the tournaments widely engage the public and promote the US image a great deal.

Through a grant PD also sponsored a soccer team at the local girls' orphanage for the 2004-05 Female National League. The girls from the orphanage are taught an Islamic-centered curriculum, so this is an opportunity to promote women's empowerment.

This year, to promote the Mission's objective to keep girls in school, PD is also sponsoring the girls' team of a public middle school.

Besides sports, another program that engages the local population focuses on music and theater productions. The kick off ceremony for Black History Month is usually a gospel concert organized in collaboration with the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), Djibouti. This concert challenges and changes the negative stereotype that locals might have of the US military base here by showing that the US forces participate in the cultural life of the city. The US gospel band on stage with local artists is the kind of image that challenges the belief that Americans are cloistered on the military camp.

Another very successful and inexpensive cultural program PD has set up in partnership with CJTF-HOA is the conversation groups (English clubs). About 350 students, aged 15-25, participate in these groups. Many attend Arabic schools during the day and study English at night. The informal structure of these groups not only grants the Embassy access to an otherwise inaccessible part of the local population, it also helps to introduce topics covering a range of social and civic issues that serve as building blocks for open discussion among group members. These groups allow Djiboutians and Americans to interact in informal settings. Many conversation topics focus on cultural differences and similarities, enabling all parties to better understanding one another.

1B. Because films and videos are associated with news more than entertainment in Djibouti, they are not as effective for outreach as interactive performing arts.

Theater, in contrast, is one of the most valued performing art activities. For the opening of IEW 2005, two English Clubs presented skits centered on the importance of education and the promotion of women's role in society. This event was a tremendous success with the public as well as with the targeted student audience. Broadcasting cultural information or events in local languages would be effective as well as extend our access to rural populations.

1C. The major constraint the Mission faces in effectively utilizing cultural and arts programs is the language barrier. Appropriate resources are not available in Somali or other local languages. However, the Mission is engaged in promoting English language through students' conversation groups, teachers training, language labs, "American Corners" library, and television programs.

Paper shows, exhibitions and the like do not get as much attention as sports events, music, and theater. The population is inclined to enjoy interactive rather than static events.

The second constraint is funding. PD funds are limited and getting scarcer as the Section is enlarging its action field, coming to interact with more ambitious projects and trying to keep up a regular enriched programming calendar.

An additional constraint is that the position of Public Diplomacy Officer (PDO) is currently vacant. The next PDO is expected by March 2006. Programs put in place by the former PDO are continuing, but new programs are on hold until a replacement arrives.

1D. PD partnered with a middle school to co-sponsor the girls' soccer team. The school is responsible for transportation and refreshments.

PD partnered with the English Clubs during IEW 2005 to perform free of charge for PD and the audience.

PD always requests partnership from the private sector when it comes to purchasing trophies and medallions for the sports tournaments, and sometimes the same private sector supplies the sports events with refreshments. These small partnerships do not significantly impact PD funds.

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